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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to make sense of the new diversity in the United States, with a focus on immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Some key facts and figures about contemporary immigrants are presented, looking at their patterns of settlement and comparing their distinctive social and economic characteristics to major U.S. racial-ethnic groups. The discussion is centered on information conveyed in four detailed tables, drawn from 1990 census data. The tables address: (1) states and counties of principal Hispanic settlement for the total Hispanic population and for Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and other subgroups; (2) population size, nativity, educational attainment, occupational level, poverty, welfare recipients, income, and percent female-headed households for Hispanic subgroups and non-Hispanic racial-ethnic groups; (3) decade of immigration, U.S. citizenship, and settlement patterns by world region and selected Latin American and Caribbean countries of birth; and (4) English proficiency, percentage of college graduates, percent in labor force, occupational level, poverty, and older adults for immigrant groups by world region and selected Latin American and Caribbean countries of birth. The fact that English language competency increases with time spent in the United States and with each successive generation is discussed in relation to misconceptions about Hispanics' alleged unwillingness to assimilate. (SV)

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Immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean: A Socioeconomic Profile

by: Rubén G. Rumbaut

From *Immigration and Ethnic Communities: A Focus on Latinos*

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Immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean: A Socioeconomic Profile

Rubén G. Rumbaut

Contemporary immigration to the United States and the formation of new ethnic groups are the complex and unintended social consequences of the expansion of the nation to its post-World War II position of global hegemony. Immigrant communities in the United States today are related to a history of American military, political, economic, and cultural involvement and intervention in the sending countries, especially in Asia and the Caribbean Basin, and to the linkages that are formed in the process that open a variety of legal and illegal migration pathways. The 19.8 million foreign-born persons counted in the 1990 U.S. census formed the largest immigrant population in the world, though in relative terms, only 7.9 percent of the U.S. population was foreign-born, a lower proportion than earlier in this century. Today's immigrants are extraordinarily diverse, a reflection of polar-opposite types of migrations embedded in very different historical and structural contexts. Also, unlike the expanding economy that absorbed earlier flows from Europe, since the 1970s new immigrants have entered an "hourglass" economy with reduced opportunities for social mobility, particularly among the less educated. New waves of refugees are entering a welfare state with expanded opportunities for public assistance. (Rumbaut 1994a).

This chapter seeks to make sense of the new diversity, with a focus on immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Some key facts and figures about contemporary immigrants are presented, looking at their patterns of settlement and comparing their distinctive social and economic characteristics to major U.S. racial-ethnic groups. Their differing modes of incorporation in — and consequences for — American society are the subject matter of more extensive articles by the author (see selected references below).

The information is conveyed in four detailed tables, drawn from the 1990 U.S. Census of Population. Each table is designed to address separate, but interrelated, issues of today's Latino[1] population:

- Patterns of settlement of the U.S. Hispanic population,
- A socioeconomic portrait of major U.S. ethnic groups, and
- A socioeconomic portrait of Latin American and Caribbean immigrant groups in the United States today.

Population and Settlement

Of the 249 million people counted by the 1990 U.S. census, there were 22.4 million Hispanics constituting 9 percent of the U.S. population — up 53 percent from 14.6 million in 1980. The sharp increase in the Hispanic population has been largely due to recent and rapidly growing immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean, making Latinos the largest immigrant population in the country. Only Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia have larger Spanish-origin populations than the United States. If current trends continue, and there is every reason to believe they will, the number of Hispanics in the United States will surpass African Americans sometime in the next decade.

As detailed in Table 1, nearly three out of four Hispanics in the United States reside in just four states — California (with over a third of the total), Texas (nearly one fifth), New York and Florida (combined for one sixth). By contrast, less than one-third of the total U.S. population resides in those states. Indeed, Hispanics now account for more than 25 percent of the populations of California and Texas.

[1]The terms Hispanic and Latino are used here interchangeably, solely in the interest of narrative efficiency, but without enthusiasm for either. They are recent official and unofficial neologisms, respectively, that seek to lump together millions of U.S. residents, immigrants or not, who trace their ancestry to the Spanish-speaking societies of "Latin" America (a term, itself in many ways a misnomer, promoted by the French during their stint of imperial control over Mexico in the 19th Century). The vast region thus labeled encompasses extraordinarily diverse peoples from many countries whose histories are obliterated when they are forced into a one-size-fits-all panethnic category; and the vast majority of people labeled Hispanic or Latino in the United States do not, in fact, identify themselves by either of these supernational terms. Today's polemics about the "politically correct" usage of "Latino" or "Hispanic" ignore the more fundamental point that such labels are historically and empirically incorrect.

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Table 1. States and Counties of Principal Hispanic Settlement in the United States, 1990

State or Country	Total 1990 Hispanic Population (22,354,000	% Hispanic Population Growth 1980-1990	% Hispanic of State or County Population	% of U.S. Hispanic Population	% of Total U.S. Hispanic Population Reported By Each Group			
					Mexican (13,496,000)	Puerto Rican (2,728,000)	Cuban (1,044,000)	Other Hispanic (5,086,000)
U.S. Total	100.0%	53.0%	9.0%	100.0%	60.4%	12.2%	4.7%	22.8%
States								
California	7,687,938	69.2	25.8	34.4	45.3	4.6	6.9	26.9
Texas	4,339,905	45.4	25.5	19.4	28.8	1.6	1.7	7.6
New York	2,214,026	33.4	12.3	9.9	0.7	39.8	7.1	18.9
Florida	1,574,143	83.4	12.2	7.0	1.2	9.1	64.6	9.7
Illinois	904,446	42.3	7.9	4.0	4.6	5.4	1.7	2.3
New Jersy	739,861	50.4	9.6	3.3	0.2	11.7	8.2	6.0
Arizona	688,338	56.2	18.8	3.1	4.6	0.3	0.2	1.2
New Mexico	579,224	21.4	38.2	2.6	2.4	0.1	0.1	4.9
Colorado	424,302	24.9	12.9	1.9	2.1	0.3	0.2	2.6
Counties								
Los Angles, CA	3,351,242	62.2	37.8	15.0	18.7	1.5	4.4	14.5
Dade (Miami), FL	953,407	64.1	49.2	4.3	0.2	2.7	54.0	5.8
Cook (Chicago), IL	694,194	39.0	13.6	3.1	3.4	4.7	1.4	1.7
Harris (Houston), TX	644,935	74.7	22.9	2.9	3.8	0.3	0.7	2.2
Bexar (San Antonio), TX	589,180	27.8	49.7	2.6	4.0	0.2	0.1	0.8
Orange (Santa Ana), CA	564,828	97.3	23.4	2.5	3.5	0.3	0.6	1.5
The Bronx, NY	523,111	32.0	43.5	2.3	0.1	12.8	0.9	3.0
San Diego, CA	510,781	85.6	20.4	2.3	3.3	0.4	0.3	1.1
Kings (Brooklyn), NY	462,411	17.9	20.1	2.1	0.2	10.1	0.9	3.1
El Paso, TX	411,619	38.6	69.6	1.8	2.9	0.1	0.0	0.3
NYC (Manhattan), NY	386,630	15.0	26.0	1.7	0.1	5.7	1.7	4.0
Queens, NY	381,120	45.2	19.5	1.7	0.1	3.7	1.8	4.9
San Bernardino, CA	378,582	128.2	26.7	1.7	2.4	0.3	0.3	0.9

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of the Population, "Persons of Hispanic Origin for the United States, 1990," and "Hispanic Origin Population by County, 1990 and 1980", 1990 Census State Summary Tape Files, STF-3, 1993.

Patterns of concentration are more pronounced for specific groups: Three-fourths of all Mexican-Americans are in California and Texas, half of the Puerto Ricans are in the New York-New Jersey area, and two-thirds of the Cubans are in Florida. Significant numbers of Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans are also in Illinois, mostly in Chicago.

The category "Other Hispanic" used by the census includes both long-established groups who trace their roots to the region prior to the annexation of the Southwest after the U.S.-Mexico War and recent immigrants from Central/South America and the Spanish Caribbean. The older group predominates in New Mexico where Hispanics account for more than 38 percent of the population despite relatively little recent immigration. About one-quarter of the recent "Other Hispanic" immigrants came to California, another quarter to New York-New Jersey, and about one-tenth to Florida.

These patterns of concentration are more pronounced in metropolitan areas within states, and, in particular, communities within metropolitan areas. Table 1 lists the 13 U.S. counties with the largest Hispanic concentration. In 1990, there were 3.4 million in Los Angeles County alone, representing 15 percent of the national Hispanic population and 38 percent of the total population of Los Angeles. Three other adjacent areas in Southern California — Orange, San Diego and San Bernardino counties — experienced the highest rates of Hispanic population growth over the past decade and, combined with Los Angeles, account for 22 percent of the U.S. total.

Nearly 8 percent of the total Hispanic population resides in four boroughs of New York City — the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens. Half of the populations of Dade County (Miami) and Bexar County (San Antonio) are Hispanic — principally of Cuban and Mexican origin, respectively. Over two-thirds of the population of El Paso (on the Mexican border) and nearly one-quarter of Harris County (Houston) are Hispanic.

Today, the Mexican-origin population of Los Angeles is exceeded only by Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey; Havana is the only city in Cuba larger than Cuban Miami; San Salvador and Santo Domingo are only slightly larger than Salvadoran Los Angeles and Dominican New York; and there are twice as many Puerto Ricans in New York City than in the capital of Puerto Rico, San Juan.

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Socioeconomic Characteristics of U.S. Hispanics and Non-Hispanics

About 60 percent of all U.S. Hispanics are of Mexican origin (13.5 million), while 12 percent are Puerto Ricans (2.7 million on the mainland, not counting the 3.5 million in Puerto Rico), making them the nation's second and third largest ethnic minority after African Americans (29 million). By comparison, only four other groups had populations in 1990 above one million:

American Indians;

Chinese — the nation's oldest and most diversified Asian-origin minority, originally recruited as laborers to California in the mid-19th century until their exclusion in 1882;

Filipinos — colonized by the United States in the first half of the 20th century; also recruited to work in plantations in Hawaii and California until the 1930s; and

Cubans — who account for 5 percent of all Hispanics and whose immigration is tied closely to the history of U.S.-Cuban relations.

Except for the oldest group, the American Indians, and the newest, the Cubans, the original incorporation was through labor importation. What is more, while the histories of each group took complex and diverse forms, the four largest ethnic minorities in the country — African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and American-Indians — are peoples whose incorporation originated largely involuntarily through conquest, occupation, and exploitation. In the case of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, the experience was followed by mass immigration during the 20th century, much of it initiated by active labor recruitment by U.S. companies, setting the foundation for subsequent patterns of social and economic inequality. These backgrounds are reflected in the socioeconomic profiles presented in Table 2 for all the major U.S. racial-ethnic groups. Note that the next three largest groups — the Chinese, Filipinos and Cubans — are today largely composed of immigrants who came to the United States since the 1960s, building on structural linkages established much earlier.

While today's immigrants come from over 100 different countries, the majority come from two sets of developing countries located either in the Caribbean Basin or in Asia, all variously characterized by significant historical ties to the United States. One set includes Mexico (still by far the largest source of both legal and illegal immigration), Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Haiti, with El Salvador and Guatemala emerging prominently as source countries for the first time during the 1980s. The other includes the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, and India. In each set, historical relationships with the United States have variously given rise to particular social networks of family and friends that over time serve as bridges of passage to the United States, linking places of origin with places of destination, opening "chain migration" channels, and giving the process of immigration its cumulative, and seemingly spontaneous, character. Many factors — economic, political, cultural, geographic, demographic — come together in particular historical contexts to explain contemporary immigration and socioeconomic incorporation of each group into the United States.

Hispanics differ sharply not only from non-Hispanics, but also among themselves, in terms of education, occupation, poverty, public assistance, per capita income, and family type. In Table 2, the major Hispanic and non-Hispanic racial-ethnic groups in the United States include both the foreign-born and the native-born without breakdown by birth. Of the 13.5 million persons of Mexican origin in the United States, two-thirds are U.S.-born; one-third are immigrants. The rest of the report will focus on the characteristics of only the foreign-born.

Immigrants in the United States Today

Table 3 provides a comparative portrait of the foreign-born population of the United States. The 19.8 million persons represent the largest immigrant population in the world. Immigrants constitute 8 percent of the total U.S. population, but this is a much lower proportion than at the turn of the century.

Table 3 also presents information on the decade of immigration, the proportion of immigrants who became U.S. citizens, and the states of principal settlement, broken down by world region and for all of the major sending countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, ordered by size of immigrant group. Latin America and the Caribbean alone accounted for nearly 43 percent of the foreign-born persons in the United States in 1990 (8.4 million), fully half of them came during the 1980s. As a result, for

Table 2. Size, Nativity and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Principal Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Racial-Ethnic Groups in the United States, 1990

Racial-ethnic Groups	Number of Persons	Nativity	Education[a]	Occupation[b]		Income[c]			Family Type
		% Foreign Born	% College Graduates	% Upper White Collar	% Lower Blue Collar	Poverty Rate %	% Public Assistance	$ Per Capita	% Female Households
Hispanic[d]	22,345,059	35.8	9.2	14.1	22.9	25.3	14.3	8,400	21.6
Mexican	13,495,938	33.3	6.3	11.6	24.9	26.3	12.5	7,447	18.2
Puerto Rican[e]	2,727,754	1.2	9.5	17.2	21.0	31.7	26.9	8,403	36.6
Cuban	1,043,932	71.7	16.5	23.2	16.5	14.6	15.2	13,786	16.3
Salvadoran	565,081	81.2	5.0	6.3	26.4	24.8	7.1	7,201	21.2
Dominican	520,151	70.6	7.8	11.1	29.4	33.0	27.1	7,381	41.2
Non-Hispanic									
White	188,128,296	3.3	22.0	28.5	13.4	9.2	5.3	16,074	11.8
Black	29,216,293	4.9	11.4	18.1	20.8	29.5	19.7	8,859	43.2
Asian & Pacific Islander	6,968,359	63.1	36.6	30.6	12.1	14.1	9.9	13,638	11.3
Chinese	1,645,472	69.3	40.7	35.8	10.6	14.0	8.3	14,877	9.4
Filipino	1,406,770	64.4	39.3	26.6	11.0	6.4	10.0	13,616	15.1
Japanese	847,562	32.4	34.5	37.0	6.9	7.0	2.9	19,373	11.9
Asian Indian	815,447	75.4	58.1	43.6	9.4	9.7	4.6	17,777	4.5
Korean	798,849	72.7	34.5	25.5	12.8	13.7	7.8	11,178	11.3
Vietnamese	593,213	79.9	17.4	17.6	20.9	25.7	24.5	9,033	15.9
Pacific Islanders[e]	365,024	12.9	10.8	18.1	16.3	17.1	11.8	10,342	18.4
American Indian, Eskimo, & Aleut	1,793,773	2.3	9.3	18.3	19.4	30.9	18.6	8,367	26.2
Total Population	**248,709,873**	**7.9**	**20.3**	**26.4**	**14.9**	**13.1**	**7.5**	**14,649**	**16.0**

[a]Education of persons 25 years and older.
[b]Employed persons 16 years and older; "upper white collar" includes professionals, executives, and managers; "lower blue collar" includes operators, fabricators, and laborers.
[c]Persons below the Federal poverty line; households receiving public assistance income.
[d]Hispanics, as classified by the census, may be of any race.
[e]Puerto Ricans and Pacific Islanders residing in the 50 U.S. states only.

Source: *U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of the Population, "Social and Economic Characteristics," 1990 CP-2-1, November 1993; "Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States," 1990 CP-3-3, August 1993.*

the first time in U.S. history, Latin American and Caribbean peoples comprise the largest immigrant population in the country.

In 1990, there were also more U.S. residents who were born in Asia than in Europe. The greatest proportions of both Latinos and Asians settled in California (Table 3).

Also shown in Table 3, the number of Asian and African immigrants more than doubled during the last decade. In fact, over four-fifths of their 1990 foreign-born populations arrived since 1970, after the 1965 Immigration Act abolished racist national-origins quotas that largely excluded non-Europeans from the Eastern Hemisphere.

In sharp contrast, Europeans and Canadians counted in the 1990 census consisted largely of older people who had immigrated well before 1960. Their immigration patterns reflect a declining trend over the past three decades.

Mexico's 1990 immigrant population in the United States (4.3 million) accounted for half of all immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, and indeed for nearly one quarter of the entire foreign-born U.S. population. Over 2 million of these Mexican immigrants were formerly undocumented immigrants whose status was legalized under the amnesty provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

The Cuban-born population in 1990 (737,000) was the next largest immigrant group, and the only one that arrived preponderantly during the 1960s. The number of Cubans arriving during the 1980s (including the 125,000 who came in the 1980 Mariel boatlift) was surpassed by the Salvadorans, Dominicans, Jamaicans, and Guatemalans. Among these last-mentioned groups, many entered illegally after the 1981 date required to qualify for the amnesty provisions of IRCA.

Among South Americans, the largest group came from Colombia, although significant numbers of Ecuadorians and Peruvians also came during the 1980s. The largest percentage increase

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since the 1970s was registered by the Guyanese. Indeed, the Guyanese share a common pattern with other English-speaking groups in the Commonwealth Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and Belize): The percentage of immigrants from these countries relative to their 1990 homeland populations is very high, most reaching double-digits.

Table 3 also provides data on the percentage of each group who had become U.S. citizens by 1990. Those immigrant groups who have been in the United States the longest (Europeans and Canadians, most of whom came before the 1960s) had higher proportions of naturalized citizens than the more recent arrivals (Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans, most of whom came the 1980s). Among these latter groups, Latin Americans had the lowest proportion of naturalized citizens (27 percent), despite the fact that Asians and Africans had higher proportions of their foreign-born populations arriving in the 1980s (57 percent and 61 percent, respectively). Clearly, time in the United States is not a sufficient explanation for why various groups become U.S. citizens at different rates. But, along with higher numbers and greater concentrations, citizenship acquisition and effective political participation are at the heart of ethnic politics and are essential for any group to make itself heard in the larger society.

Among legal immigrants, research has shown that the motivation and propensity to naturalize is higher among younger persons with higher levels of education, occupational status, English proficiency, income, and property, and whose spouse or children are U.S. citizens. In fact, the combination of three variables alone — educational level, geographical proximity, and political origin of migration — largely explain differences in citizenship acquisition among immigrant groups. Meanwhile, undocumented immigrants, ineligible for citizenship, remain permanently disenfranchised.

A Socioeconomic Portrait of Principal Immigrant Groups

Table 4 extends this general picture with detailed 1990 census information on social and economic characteristics of immigrant groups, ranked in order of their proportion of college graduates (as a proxy for their social class origins). These data, which are compared against the norms for the total U.S.-born population, reveal the extraordinary socioeconomic diversity of U.S. immigrants, in general, and of those from the Americas, in particular.

A first point that stands out in Table 4 is the high proportion of African and Asian immigrants who are college graduates (47 and 38 percent, respectively) and who have upper-white collar occupations (37 and 32 percent) — well above the U.S. averages for both.

Certain countries are well above their continental averages (while others are, of course, below). For example, over 90 percent of Indian immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s had professional and managerial occupations prior to immigration, as did four-fifths in the late 1970s and two-thirds in the 1980s, despite the fact that many of these immigrants were admitted under family reunification preferences. By the mid-1970s there were already more Filipino and Indian foreign medical graduates in the United States than there were American black physicians. By the mid-1980s, one-fifth of all engineering doctorates awarded by U.S. universities went to foreign-born students from Taiwan, India, and South Korea. By 1990, the U.S. census showed that the most highly educated groups in the United States were immigrants from India, Taiwan, and Nigeria. These data document a classic pattern of "brain drain" immigration; indeed, although they come from developing countries, these immigrants as a group are perhaps more skilled than ever before. These facts help explain the recent popularization of Asians as a "model minority" and debunk nativist calls for restricting immigrants to those perceived to be more "assimilable" on the basis of language and culture.

Canadians and Europeans, though high proportions of them are among the older resident groups (as reflected in their low rates of labor force participation and high naturalization rates), show levels of education slightly below the U.S. average, an occupational profile slightly above it, and lower poverty rates.

Latin Americans as a whole, by contrast, have high rates of labor force participation but well below-average levels of educational attainment, are concentrated in lower blue-collar employment (operators, fabricators and laborers), and exhibit higher poverty rates.

As in any of the continental groupings, a much different picture emerges when Latin America is broken down by national origin, rather than under a supranational rubric of "Hispanic" or "Latino." Among Latin Americans, the highest socioeconomic status (SES) is attained by Venezuelans, Argentineans, Bolivians, and Chileans. That these nationals are among the smallest of the immigrant groups suggests that they consist substantially of highly skilled persons who entered under the occupational preferences of U.S. immigration law. Brazilians have also recently joined this higher status category.

Mexicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Dominicans had the lowest SES — and constituted the largest groups of immigrants entering both legally and illegally in the 1980s. Their socioeconomic characteristics approximate those of Puerto Ricans on the mainland (see Table 2), with Dominican immigrants' poverty rate at 30.5 percent, approaching that of the Puerto Ricans' 31.7 percent (and that of the total Dominican U.S. population at 33 percent). Hondurans, Ecuadorians, and Nicaraguans also exhibited a much above average ratio of lower-blue-collar to upper-white collar employment, as did to a lesser extent Haitians and Colombians. Panamanians, Peruvians, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, and Cubans attained levels of education near the U.S. norm, and their occupational and income characteristics were also closer to the national average. Occupying an intermediate position were groups from the English-speaking Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad,

Table 3.Size, Year of Immigration, U.S. Citizenship and Patterns of Concentration of Principal Immigrant Groups in the U.S. in 1990, by Region and Selected Latin American/Caribbean Countries of Birth

Region or Country of Birth	# Foreign-Born Persons	Year of Immigration to the United States				Naturalized U.S. Citizen		Principal States of Settlement		
		% 1980's	% 1980's	% 1980's	% 1980's	% Yes	% No	% California	% NY/NJ	% Florida
Region:										
Latin America/Caribbean	8,416,924	50	28	15	7	27	73	38.7	17.9	12.8
Asia	4,979,037	57	29	9	5	41	59	40.2	15.7	2.3
Europe	4,350,403	20	13	19	48	64	36	15.4	27.2	6.9
Canada	744,830	17	12	20	51	54	46	21.0	9.6	10.4
Africa	363,819	61	28	7	4	34	66	18.1	22.2	4.1
Latin American & Caribbean										
Spanish-Speaking Countries										
Mexico	4,298,014	50	31	11	8	23	77	57.6	1.3	1.3
Cuba	736,971	26	19	46	9	51	49	6.7	15.6	67.5
El Salvador	485,433	76	19	4	1	15	85	60.3	10.5	2.1
Dominican Republic	347,858	53	27	17	3	28	72	1.0	79.9	6.7
Columbia	286,124	52	27	18	3	29	71	10.7	43.0	23.3
Guatemala	225,739	69	22	7	2	17	83	60.2	10.7	5.1
Nicaragua	168,659	75	16	5	4	15	85	34.6	7.1	42.7
Perú	144,199	60	22	13	5	27	73	26.1	23.2	16.9
Ecuador	143,314	40	33	22	5	26	74	13.6	63.1	7.7
Honduras	108,923	64	19	12	5	26	74	24.0	25.2	19.1
Argentina	92,563	39	24	28	9	44	56	29.1	27.6	14.2
Panama	85,737	35	22	23	20	51	49	15.0	35.9	13.4
Chile	55,681	37	39	16	8	33	67	26.1	23.2	16.9
Costa Rica	43,530	44	26	21	9	33	67	30.0	26.6	15.7
Venzuela	42,119	67	15	12	6	23	77	11.3	19.5	33.2
Bolivia	31,303	50	23	18	10	30	70	22.5	16.6	9.7
Uruguay	20,766	38	38	19	5	38	62	13.2	46.7	13.0
Paraguay	6,057	41	40	14	5	33	67	15.4	37.9	5.6
English-Speaking Countries										
Jamaica	334,140	47	33	15	5	38	62	3.4	50.2	22.1
Guyana	120,698	63	27	8	2	40	60	3.5	75.6	6.5
Trinidad and Tobago	115,710	38	37	22	3	32	68	4.9	59.6	10.5
Barbados	43,015	34	37	19	10	46	54	2.9	68.1	5.9
Belize	29,957	32	33	31	4	35	65	44.8	25.2	5.7
Bahamas	21,633	39	32	8	21	33	67	2.1	12.5	66.6
Other-Language Countries										
Haiti	225,393	61	26	11	2	27	73	1.2	45.7	36.9
Brazil	82,489	56	15	18	11	24	76	15.8	27.9	11.3
Total Foreign-Born	**19,767,316**	**44**	**25**	**14**	**17**	**41**	**59**	**32.7**	**19.3**	**8.4**
Total Native-Born	**228,942,557**	-	-	-	-	-	-	**10.2**	**9.6**	**4.9**

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census of Population, "1990 Ethnic Profiles for States, CPH-L-98; "The Foreign Born Population in the United States," 1990 CP-3-1, July 1993, Tables 1, 3; and "The Foreign Born Population in the United States, 1990," CPH-L-98, Table 13. Data on year of immigration are drawn from a 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 1990 census,and are subject to sample variability; decimals are rounded off.

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Barbados, Guyana), whose SES patterns are similar, but somewhat below U.S. norms.

Table 4 also shows the level of English language proficiency of the U.S. foreign-born population, by region and for all of the major Latin American and Caribbean immigrant groups. As a whole, both Latin American and Caribbean immigrants exhibit a much lower degree of English proficiency than Asians, Africans and Europeans. But among these Hispanic groups, there is as much diversity in their patterns of language competency as in their other socioeconomic characteristics. Nearly all immigrants from the Commonwealth Caribbean are English monolinguals (a much higher proportion than even Canadians). Among all other Latinos, Panamanians, the oldest resident immigrant group from Latin America (Table 3), were the most proficient in English (over one-fourth were English monolinguals), followed by immigrants from Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile (the highest-SES groups from Latin America). The least proficient, with approximately half reporting being unable to speak English well or at all, were immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. Recall that these last-mentioned groups were among the largest immigrant cohorts of the 1980s, as well as the lowest-SES groups from Latin America.

In addition to education and time in the United States, age provides a key to English speaking proficiency (or the lack of it), as does residence within dense ethnic enclaves. For example, among Cuban refugees, whose median age is far higher than other immigrant groups from the Americas (about a third are over 60 years old), 40 percent reported speaking English not well or at all. On closer inspection, these older persons tend to reside in areas of high ethnic concentration, such as Miami.

Still, the data in Table 4 show that even among the most recently arrived groups, large proportions are able to speak English well or very well and that non-negligible proportions of the foreign-born speak English only. These facts notwithstanding, English language competency particularly among Hispanic immigrants in the United States — and their alleged Spanish "retentiveness" and "unwillingness" to assimilate — has become a highly charged sociopolitical issue, with nativist organizations warning about cultural "Balkanization" and Quebec-like linguistic separatism in regions of high Hispanic concentration.[2] Such fears are wholly misplaced. English fluency not only increases over time in the United States for all immigrant groups, but English is also by far the preferred language of the second generation.

For children of immigrants, it is their mother tongue that atrophies over time, and quickly: The third generation typically grows up speaking English only. This historical pattern explains why the United States has been called a "language graveyard." But such enforced linguistic homogeneity represents an enormous waste of cultural capital in an era of global competition, when the need for Americans who speak foreign languages fluently is increasingly important. Far from posing a social or cultural threat, the resources and opportunities opened up by fluent bilingualism in scattered communities throughout the United States enrich American society and the lives of natives and immigrants alike.

ERRATA: p. 6, Table 3 should be:

Year of Immigration to the United States			
1980s (%)	1970s (%)	1960s (%)	Pre-1960 (%)

[2] In a child custody case in 1995, a Texas judge, Samuel C. Kiser, went so far as to characterize a Mexican immigrant mother's use of Spanish at home with her five-year-old daughter as a form of child abuse that would "relegate the child to the position of housemaid." See Sam Howe Verhoved, "Mother Scolded by Judge for Speaking in Spanish," *New York Times*, August 30, 1995.

Table 4. English Proficiency and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Principal Immigrant Groups in the United States in 1990 in Order of Percentage of College Graduates, by Region and Selected Latin American/Caribbean Countries of Birth

Country/Region of Birth	# of Persons	Speak English[a]		Education[b]	Labor Force and Occupation[c]			Income[d]	Age
		% English Only	% Not Well or At All	% College Grads	% in Labor Force	% Upper-White Collar	% Lower-Blue Collar	% in Poverty	% 60 Years or Older
Region:									
Africa	363,819	25	5	47.1	75.1	37	12	15.7	6
Asia	4,979,037	8	22	38.4	66.4	32	13	16.2	11
Europe and Canada	5,095,233	45	9	18.6	52.2	32	12	9.3	40
Latin America and Caribbean	8,416,924	13	40	9.1	70.7	12	26	24.3	10
Latin America and Caribbean:									
Spanish Speaking Countries									
Venezuala	42,119	9	12	37.2	68.2	34	11	21.1	5
Argentina	92,563	8	15	27.7	74.0	33	11	11.0	13
Bolivia	31,303	5	16	26.1	76.3	22	12	13.8	7
Chile	55,681	7	20	23.5	74	27	14	11.0	10
Panama	85,737	26	7	20.5	69.3	24	10	15.7	13
Perú	144,199	4	30	20.5	75.9	18	19	14.8	8
Paraguay	6,057	5	28	18.9	75.2	18	16	13.7	5
Uruguay	20,766	4	30	15.5	76.2	19	22	10.7	9
Cuba	736,971	5	40	15.4	63.8	23	18	14.9	30
Columbia	286,124	5	34	15.1	73.7	17	22	15.4	8
Nicaragua	168,659	4	41	14.5	73.3	11	24	24.4	7
Costa Rica	43,530	7	22	14.0	69.5	18	16	16.2	10
Ecuador	143,314	4	39	11.4	73.9	14	27	15.3	9
Honduras	108,923	6	37	8.1	71.0	9	24	28.4	6
Dominican Republic	347,858	4	45	7.3	63.6	10	31	30.5	8
Guatamala	225,739	3	45	5.8	75.9	7	28	26.0	4
El Salvador	485,433	3	49	4.6	76.2	6	27	25.1	4
Mexico	4,298,014	4	49	3.5	69.7	6	32	29.8	7
English Speaking Countries									
Bahamas	21,633	80	1	18.0	54.8	13	10	23.6	19
Guyana	120,698	94	1	15.8	74.2	19	12	11.9	9
Trinidad and Tobago	115,710	94	0	15.6	77.2	20	10	14.9	9
Jamaica	334,140	94	0	14.9	77.4	22	11	12.1	12
Barbados	43,015	98	0	8.6	76.7	11	8	9.4	16
Belize	29,957	88	0	8.0	77.0	17	9	15.5	8
Other Language Countries									
Brazil	82,489	16	23	34.2	71.6	20	12	10.8	11
Haiti	225,393	6	23	11.8	77.7	14	21	21.7	7
Total Foreign-Born	**19,767,316**	**21**	**26**	**20.6**	**64.3**	**22**	**19**	**18.2**	**18**
Total Native-Born	**228,942,557**	**92**	**1**	**20.3**	**65.4**	**27**	**14**	**12.7**	**17**

[a]English proficiency of persons 5 years and older.
[b]Educational attainment of persons 25 years and older.
[c]Labor force participation and occupation for employed persons 16 years and older; "upper white collar" includes professionals, executives and managers; "lower blue collar" includes operators, fabricators, and laborers.
[d]Percentage of persons below the federal poverty line.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of the Population, "The Foreign Born Population of the United States," CP-3-1, July 1993, Tables 1-5; "Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States," CP-3-3, August 1993, Tables 1-5; and data drawn from a 5 Percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), subject to sample variability.

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Related Readings by the Author

Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 1990 (2nd edition forthcoming). *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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SIDEPOINT

Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut

Immigrant America today differs from that at the turn of the century. The human drama of the story remains as riveting, but the cast of characters and their circumstances have changed in complex ways. The newcomers are different, reflecting in their motives and origins the forces that have forged a new world order in the second half of this century. And the America that receives them is not the same society that processed the "huddled masses" through Ellis Island, a stone's throw away from the nation's preeminent national monument to liberty and new beginnings. As a result, theories that sought to explain the assimilation of yesterday's immigrants are hard put to illuminate the nature of contemporary immigration.

Source: Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, 1990, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, "Preface," Berkeley: University of California Press.